Tech4Nature: Why Healthy Forests Mean Healthy People

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SHENZHEN, China, March 21, 2023 /CNW/ --Themed 'Forests and Health', this year's International Day of Forests on March 21 is a call for humanity to consider its relationship with the Earth's forests and the direct impact they have on our longevity and well-being.

Many people are familiar with the metaphor that forests are the lungs of the planet, breathing out clean air and serving as vital carbon sinks that mitigate the effects of climate change. Fewer, however, are aware of the intrinsic links that forests have with our day-to-day health.

Did you know?

As well as the planet's lungs, forests are also nature's pharmacy and larder.

They provide us with around 25% of western medicines, with upwards of 50,000 plants contributing to modern drugs. And a studyof 27 African countries shows that children exposed to forests had 25% greater diet diversity thanks to an abundance of fruit, vegetables, bush meat, fish, and edible oils.

But the prognosis for forests is alarming. Around 35% of the world's forest cover has been lost, with 82% of the remainder degraded.

The rapidity and extent of these threats require long-term, committed intervention.

A story of protection

One way technology is protecting forest ecosystems is by preventing illegal logging, which accounts for up to 90% of all logging activities and is a major contributor to global deforestation.

In Similajau National Park in Malaysia's Sarawak state, we are working with the Sarawak Forest Department and Sarawak Forestry Corporation to enable the Sarawak government to protect its rainforests. The park is not just rich in biodiversity, it is also a sustainable source of medicine and food for local people, many of whom depend on the forest for their livelihoods.

However, illegal logging remains a prominent threat, causing widespread degradation of the rainforest ecosystem and biodiversity loss.

Now, though, there is hope. 'Guardian' acoustic monitoring devices can detect the sound of trucks and chainsaws used for illegal logging. Each Guardian can cover an area of 7 km and send networked real-time alerts via a cloud platform to rangers' phones, enabling real-time intervention.

Audio and visual monitoring technology and AI analytics can also help monitor endangered species through their vocalizations. By tracking their populations and distribution, conservationists can develop precise conservation measures. Of particular interest are umbrella species, the well-being of which is pivotal to the health of the forest

ecosystems they inhabit. Examples of biodiversity monitoring projects that target umbrella species include Darwin's foxes in Chile and jaguars in Mexico's Dzilam State Reserve.

Technology can also trigger smart conservation action in forested areas. In Switzerland, a pilot Tech4Nature project in partnership with IUCN and Porini Foundation uses blockchain to develop a system to trace carbon sequestration to boost the transparency and traceability of forest carbon sink transactions, with a view to using these credits to fund other biodiversity conservation projects.

The above are examples of forest ecosystem protection projects under Huawei's TECH4ALL initiative. Together with global partners, technological solutions have been developed comprising audio and visual monitoring devices, communication networks, cloud, and AI analytics. These can achieve conservation outcomes that would have been impossible even a decade ago.

With scientific evidence strongly correlating forest health and human health, it is imperative that we keep our forests healthy. Our experience so far shows that this approach is working. And that knowledge drives us to keep striving with our partners to help build a healthy, sustainable future for both us and our forests.

Learn more about Huawei's TECH4ALL and Tech4Nature initiatives.

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